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UNCLAS AMMAN 010151

SIPDIS

INTERIOR FOR USGS

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: [PREL](#) [SENV](#) [XF](#) [JO](#)

SUBJECT: The "Little" Peace Process Engine That Could - The EXACT Regional Water Data Banks Project

1. Summary: Ten years after its inception, the "little" Middle East Peace Process Regional Water Data Banks Project called "EXACT" is still chugging along, enjoying the strong support of both donors and the "core parties" Israel, the Palestinian Authority and Jordan. This is due to dogged U.S. support from the State Department and the U.S. Geological Survey and relatively modest financial inputs from the United States, the EU, Holland, France and other donors. At the twentieth meeting of EXACT, held in Prague November 30 - December 2, 2004, the core parties stressed the importance of the project, praised the efforts of current donors and welcomed three new donors to the project. As noted by two core party representatives, EXACT is a "remarkable" and "amazing" long-term success story in the Middle East. End summary.

Water Placed Outside Politics

2. In the early days of the multilateral peace process, U.S. support catalyzed and facilitated EXACT. EXACT and the other multilateral water projects are based on agreement among the core parties that water issues belong outside the political realm. While the science of the EXACT projects matters, the practical necessity of continued cooperation among the parties is the glue that has kept EXACT together through the ups and downs of its ten-year life. One delegate said that interactions on water under EXACT have supported engagement on broader issues, a clear example of leadership from below.

Core Parties Now Cooperate to Interact with Donors as a Team

3. The health of EXACT can be seen in several ways, for example the methods of interaction. During the initial years of EXACT, the core parties would meet only with the United States or another third party present. The core parties realized, though, that they could be more effective working as a team, in effect taking charge and appealing as a group to the donors. So the EXACT "Parliament" was born. Representatives from Israel, the Palestinian Authority and Jordan now routinely meet in the region without other parties present to plan their approach to the EXACT donors. The commitment to the projects and to EXACT is so strong that the core party representatives have resisted outside pressure against their activities by continuing to participate in projects and meetings. Core parties now reach out to each other directly and explicitly with requests for cooperation and assistance.

Substantive Areas Have Expanded

4. EXACT has also broadened its substantive role. Originally developed with a specific list of recommendations related to water data issues, EXACT has grown over the years to include projects on rainfall, water quality labs, toxic substances in water, surface and groundwater monitoring systems and studies on aquifer recharge. See the EXACT website at www.exact-me.org for more information. A recent project on rainfall broadened the user group within the core parties by bringing in the meteorological services to cooperate with the water ministries, the traditional interest group in EXACT.

New Donors

5. EXACT is attracting new donors. At the most recent EXACT meeting in Prague on November 30 - December 2, the United Kingdom and Switzerland joined EXACT, and Australia rejoined after a multi-year hiatus. Other potential new donors are in the offing. This new blood is the fruit of a decision last year by the core parties to reach out to new donors.

6. Comment: U.S. contributions to EXACT have been relatively modest over the years, averaging no more than \$1 million per year. But these contributions along with U.S. leadership of the EXACT process and financial contributions of other participating donors have facilitated efforts by the core parties to develop robust, collegial working relationships on one of the most sensitive issues in one of the most contentious areas in the world.

7. This cable has been cleared by USGS and by NEA/REA.

